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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8708
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 1858
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE IMMEDIATE 1436
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
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RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 2270
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1655
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 001753

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DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [MARR](#) [KG](#)
SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON AIRBASE SHOOTING
INCIDENT

REF: A. BISHKEK 1736
[1](#)B. BISHKEK 1733
[1](#)C. BISHKEK 1722
[1](#)D. BISHKEK 1706

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Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY. On December 12, Ambassador met with Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Ermek Ibragimov regarding the way ahead on the Manas air base shooting incident. He agreed that the incident had become an internal political issue, making it harder to contain. He raised questions about the immunity of U.S. personnel at the base and said it was important for the U.S. to respond to the Kyrgyz diplomatic notes on the incident, so that we can start moving forward, and suggested several other steps to create a better public perception of the base. Ibragimov requested the U.S. collision report noting that the accumulation of incidents was creating a difficult environment, which in turn made it more difficult to resolve the incidents. END SUMMARY.

CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

[12.](#) (C) On December 12, Ambassador met with Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Ermek Ibragimov regarding the way ahead on the shooting incident (Refs a, b,c). Ambassador said that the shooting was a tragedy, but it was important to look at the incident in context and manage the political fallout. Ibragimov agreed that the incident had become an internal political issue as much as anything. He added that &political forces8 -- and specified the Russians -- were trying to use the incident to create issues about the base once again. He said that there is a possibility that parliament will discuss this issue; Deputy Tekebayev has told us the same thing.

[13.](#) (C) Ibragimov also said that Foreign Minister

Jekshenkulov was not raising the issue of the immunity of base personnel in a constructive way and that we were returning to the &situation in the spring,⁸ although he did not think that the entire MOU would be put on the table again. Ambassador said she was sure that Ibragimov knew the U.S. position on immunity for servicemen, and that changing this would create a precedent and was therefore unlikely. Ibragimov noted that several years ago the Georgians had stripped a Georgian diplomat in Washington of his immunity following a drunk driving incident; perhaps we could follow the same model, he suggested, although the Kyrgyz &could give the Airman back.⁸

KYRGYZ NEED A RESPONSE

¶4. (C) Ibragimov said it was important for the U.S. to respond to the diplomatic notes the MFA has sent regarding the incident, so that we could discuss the issues and try to put the issue behind us) or at least lower the profile over the Kyrgyz holidays. &Talking is still better than silence,⁸ he said, although he noted that he was less optimistic than he had been previously. Ibragimov noted that if the U.S. agrees to a joint working group regarding the Base, he did not want to make the same mistake as last spring by making an announcement about the group as expectations would be raised regarding the immunity issue. The Ambassador pointed out that it was the President who had raised the issue on national television: expectations were already raised. Ibragimov winced, but claimed the President had had no choice; the President needed to show the Kyrgyz people that he was defending their interests.

CONSTRUCTIVE SUGGESTIONS

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¶5. (C) Ibragimov asked what the U.S. planned to do to help the widow and was not completely surprised when the Ambassador explained that U.S. compensation procedures could only be invoked in the case of a finding of wrongful action on the part of the U.S. airman. He noted the difference in practice in Kyrgyzstan and said that the public would look at the case differently, if the U.S. took care of the next of kin. Ibragimov also urged full transparency when the investigation is concluded, as he said that rumors are multiplying that the driver was shot in the back. This creates a difficult public atmosphere, he concluded.

COLLISION REPORT OVERDUE

¶6. (C) Ibragimov asked when the Kyrgyz would receive the Acccident Investigation Board report regarding the September collision. He urged that we speed up the process and said the U.S. is not being responsive. He cautioned that the cumulative effect of the two car accidents (with, he alleged, two Kyrgyz fatalities and no punishment for US Servicemen), the September collision, and the shooting incident was not only harmful to bilateral relations, it was harmful to the base and raises questions about the presence of the base.

BASE ISSUES AFFECT OTHER BILATERAL EQUITIES

¶7. (C) Ambassador raised the harassment of NDI, IRI and IFES by the Procuracy (Ref d). She noted that Jekshenkulov had told her he would discuss the issue with General Procurator Kongantiyev. Ambassador related a disturbing conversation that she had with Kongantiyev on the margins of a conference. Kongantiyev said the 1993 Bilateral Agreement that governs U.S assistance in Kyrgyzstan was &illegal,⁸ because it had not been ratified by the U.S. Congress and that U.S. implementers needed to obey the law. The Ambassador agreed that U.S. implementers -- and for that

matter everyone in Kyrgyzstan -- had to obey the law. However, she said that it appeared that the law was being selectively applied for political reasons. In addition, she noted that if the Kyrgyz called the 1993 Bilateral Agreement into question it would affect not only democracy programs, but other forms of assistance including assistance to the Procuracy. Ambassador reminded Ibragimov that he had told her there was no political connection, but this seemed highly unlikely and the issue needed to be solved politically as he had promised last week. Ibragimov took the point, but noted that it would be difficult to solve while the Base issues were so controversial. The Ambassador noted that NDI, IRI and IFES had strong constituencies in Washington, and that our concerns on this issue would not diminish.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) The Kyrgyz are angry over the shooting incident, and they are becoming angrier about what they perceive as a pattern of a lack of responsiveness from the U.S. The sooner we can respond, and the more flexible we can be in our response without giving away U.S. equities, the better for the long-term situation at the Base. The same is true for the Accident Investigation Board Report regarding the September collision, which unfortunately has become conflated with the shooting incident -- and other resentments including the widely-held perception that the Kyrgyz are not adequately compensated for the Base -- making both issues more difficult to resolve.

¶9. (C) While the rhetoric in many circles remains white-hot and some public officials continue to stoke the flame, others officials are becoming more temperate. However, they are not sure how to walk back the immunity issue, as it has been put

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into the public arena by the President himself. We hope that Ibragimov's comparison to the situation last spring is valid. At that time, the President had publicly raised the price of the base to dizzying heights and in April even issued a public ultimatum regarding the negotiations, but in the end accepted far less than he had initially insisted on publicly. While some criticized the President's intemperance, others appeared to view the tough talk as a handy substitute for action. That said, it does not appear that the Kyrgyz themselves know exactly where they want to go on these issues, making it harder for us to game out whether they will insist on lifting immunities or seek greater compensation. Moreover, the number of incidents that have accumulated since the spring has helped create a highly charged atmosphere where it is difficult to find common ground.

YOVANOVITCH